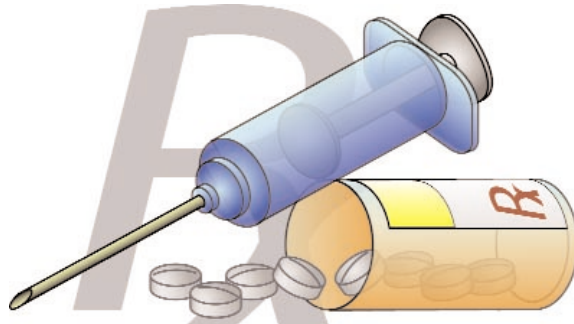




Hepatitis B Treatments

What treatments are available for chronic hepatitis B?

Most people can fight off the hepatitis B virus (HBV) without developing chronic (life-long) hepatitis B or needing treatment. For individuals who are unable to get rid of the virus, there are two groups or classes of drugs commonly used in the treatment of chronic hepatitis B. These include:



• Alpha-interferons

This was the first group of drugs ever used for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B. Interferon is a protein that is produced in the body in response to viral infections like hepatitis B. Interferon is approved by the *Food and Drug Administration (FDA)* for treatment of people with chronic hepatitis B.

- Interferon is given as a shot
- Interferon therapy usually lasts 4-6 months
- Interferon may make HBV go from an *active* state (where the virus multiplies) to *non-active* (where the virus stops multiplying)
- Interferon may cause side effects such as flu-like symptoms, rashes, and depression

• Nucleoside analogs

This is a new class of drugs that has been approved by the FDA for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B. A drug called lamivudine has been used successfully in some individuals with chronic hepatitis B.

- Lamivudine is taken by mouth
- Lamivudine is usually a longer therapy than interferon
- Lamivudine may make HBV go from an *active* state (where the virus multiplies) to *non-active* (where the virus is not multiplying)
- Lamivudine rarely causes side effects
- Lamivudine may work for people who did not respond to interferon therapy

There are other medications that are being researched in clinical trials. Speak with your doctor if you would like more information on hepatitis B treatments that are being studied.

Is treatment right for everyone with chronic hepatitis B?

Treatment is not right for everyone with chronic hepatitis B. Talk with your VA doctor to see if treatment is right for you. Treatment for chronic hepatitis B often works best for people with

- low levels of HBV in the blood
- high liver enzymes

Does treatment work for everyone with chronic hepatitis B?

Treatment for chronic hepatitis B does not work for everyone. If you are a *non-responder*, it means that treatment did not work as well as your doctor had hoped. There are different types of responses to treatment:

- **Transient Response**

The treatment worked only as long as you took it. When the treatment stopped, HBV came back.

- **Breakthrough Response**

The treatment seemed to work at first, but then it stopped working. One of the reasons for this might be the presence of virus that is resistant to treatment.

- **Partial Response**

The treatment seemed to work a little bit, but never worked completely.

- **Complete Response**

While you were taking drugs for chronic hepatitis B the treatment worked and continued to work when treatment finished.

What can I do to keep myself healthy?

If you have chronic hepatitis B, here are some suggestions on how to keep yourself healthy:

- **Avoid alcohol**
- **Avoid unsafe sex**
- **Avoid sharing needles**
- **Avoid medicines that may cause more damage to your liver**
- **Ask your doctor about tests to check for liver damage**
- **Ask your doctor about the hepatitis A vaccine**
- **Learn how to protect yourself from other hepatitis viruses**
- **Join a support group for people with chronic hepatitis B**

Who can I call for more information?

- **Your local VA medical center**
and visit <http://www.va.gov/hepatitis>
- **The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)**
(888) 4HEPCDC [(888) 443-7232] and visit <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>